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ABSTRACT

Although explicit public-private partnerships are rare in education, there is a close connection between the public and private goals of education. Education inherently serves both public and private interests. Unfortunately, educational policy may find itself in conflict while simultaneously serving both public and private mandates. This article reviews that challenge and presents a variety of ways on which public and private sectors collaborate educationally. It reviews a range of linkages between the public and private sectors in elementary and secondary education. The article begins by reviewing the peculiar nature of education in producing what is both a public and private good. This suggests that public and private collaboration should be central to education. It follows with several existing interventions that link the public and private sectors and points out the necessity of public-private collaboration while also stressing the continuing sources of tension between the two sectors when it comes to education. Finally, it presents a venture to link public and private sectors in education by providing publicly financed vouchers that could be used for private schools. (Author/WFA)

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The Public-Private Nexus in Education

Henry M. Levin*

March 2000

Abstract—Although explicit public-private partnerships are rare in education, there is a close connection between the public and private goals of education. Education inherently serves both public and private interests. It addresses public interests by preparing the young to assume adult roles that promote civic responsibility, embrace a common set of economic and political values, and share a common language. Education serves private interests in promoting individual development, understanding, and productivity that contribute to adult productivity and well-being. Unfortunately, educational policy may find itself in conflict while simultaneously serving both public and private mandates. This article reviews that challenge and presents a variety of ways on which public and private sectors collaborate educationally. It focuses most fully on the issues that arise from recent proposals for educational vouchers in which public resources would be used to promote and fund schools in the private marketplace.

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* The author is the William Heard Kilpatrick Professor of Economics and Education at Teachers College, Columbia University, and the Director of the National Center for the Study of Privatization in Education (NCSPE). Email: levin@exchange.tc.columbia.edu.

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NCSPE
Box 181
Teachers College, Columbia University
525 W. 120th Street
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(212) 678-3259 (telephone)
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ncspe@columbia.edu
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A partnership is generally viewed as a formal agreement between two or more parties that provides mutual benefits to those parties. It is rare that such partnerships exist between public and private elementary or secondary schools. Despite the fact that only about 10 percent of the students are enrolled in private schools, educational institutions in the two sectors are competing for many of the same students and do not find it to their advantage to work together. In higher education there exist a variety of agreements such as consortia based upon joint sharing of libraries, course registrations, and cooperative programs, however such partnerships are still modest in scope and are the exception rather than the rule.

At a broader level there exist many intersections between the public sector in education and various private entities. Whether one would call them policy partnerships is less clear. It is probably fair to say that most formal partnerships between the two sectors are modest in scope. The most prominent of these are public assistance to private schools and business-education partnerships. In these cases there are formal relations between government and private schools, on the one hand, and between private businesses and public schools, on the other. In a broader context it is clear that the education of each child must necessarily be a public-private undertaking to the degree that its success is premised on a parent-school partnership. What students learn depends not only on what happens in school, but what happens in the home and the degree to which homes and schools are mutually supportive of each other's goals.

In this article, I will review a range of linkages between the public and private sectors in elementary and secondary education. I will begin by reviewing the peculiar nature of education in producing what is both a public and private good. This suggests that public-

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private collaboration should be central to education. I will follow with several existing interventions that link the public and private sectors, and I will point out the necessity of public-private collaboration while also stressing the continuing sources of tension between the two sectors when it comes to education. Finally, I will present the most ambitious venture to link public and private sectors in education by providing publicly financed vouchers that could be used for private schools.

Education as a Public and Private Good

Education inherently serves both public and private interests (Levin, 1987). It addresses public interests by preparing the young to assume adult roles in which they can undertake civic responsibilities, embrace a common set of values, participate in a democratic polity with a given set of rules, and embrace the economic, political, and social life which constitute the foundation for the nation. All of this is necessary for an effectively, functioning democracy, economy, and society. At the same time, education must address the private interests of students and their families by providing a variety of forms of development which will enhance individual economic, social, cultural, and political benefits for the individual. Embedded in the same educational experience are outcomes that can contribute to the overall society as well as those which can provide private gains to the individual.

To some degree the public and private outcomes of schooling can overlap in that better educational results for the individual and her family may also contribute to social benefits. For example, if schooling makes the individual more productive (private benefits), the economy also receives a boost (social benefits). But, in other respects there may be conflict between public and private benefits. For example, the public benefits of schooling require

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that students learn to consider different points of view which are presented and debated in the schooling experience. But, the private values of families may be in conflict with some of these viewpoints, and parents may not wish their children to be exposed to points of view that are at odds with those held by the family.

The problem is that schooling takes place at the intersection of two sets of rights, those of the family and those of society. The first is the right of parents to choose the experiences, influences and values to which they expose their children, the right to rear their children in the manner that they see fit. The second is the right of a democratic society to use the educational system as a means to reproduce its most essential political, economic and social institutions through a common schooling experience (Gutman, 1987). In essence, the challenge is that of preserving the shared educational experience necessary for establishing a common foundation of knowledge and values that is crucial to reproducing the existing economic, political, and social order (public goals), while allowing some range of choice within that to meet private goals. Because the schools represent the primary agency for preparing all students for the major institutions that constitute the bedrock of society, this requirement suggests a schooling process that comprises many common experiences for all students, even if some of these violate the choices that families might make independently for their children.

Both sets of rights are legitimate, and both are partially, but not completely, compatible. It is clear that public schools cannot be advocates for each and all of the many different and incompatible perspectives that parents have regarding culture, language, values, religion, and politics. As a concrete example, there are clearly very strong differences in viewpoint within the polity about the permissibility of allowing abortion. In the larger society this is a very controversial matter that must be resolved politically. But, emotions run very strongly on

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the perspectives. On one side of the issue, abortion is considered to be infanticide. On the other side of the issue, abortion is considered to be a matter of choice for determining the fate of a fetus that is not yet endowed with human properties. This conflict is embedded in deeply held philosophical, religious, and political ideologies.

One group of parents would like the young to see abortion as murder and another group as family planning, and both sides would consider the contrary view to be illegitimate. This makes it difficult for the schools to present the issue in any form. The easiest route for the schools is to avoid the issue. But, the courts, legislatures, and Congress cannot avoid the issue, and it is one on which all citizens should develop an informed understanding that is communicated through the political process. This is an example of a public dimension of education that that may be in conflict with the private goals of many families who want to keep the issue outside of public discourse or to inculcate the correctness of one particular view without debate. There are many other public issues that cry out for democratic resolution, but are found objectionable for private reasons by families. This is often the situation when parents decry the teaching of inappropriate values in the public schools, the fact that the public schools do not inculcate the parents' values. In such a case, parents may put pressures on schools and school boards to make changes, or they may opt to send their children to other schools, public or private (Hirschman, 1970).

Any discussion on public and private issues in education must recognize the tension between public and private benefits and goals. As long as education has both public and private components, there must be a balance and blending. The solution will always be a compromise that will leave some parents dissatisfied. This dissatisfaction will lead to pressures for change or to escape from public schooling with private schools and home

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schooling as possible alternatives. In other cases, parents will move to other jurisdictions that sponsor public schools that are more compatible with their beliefs.

Much of the debate about the proper roles of public schools and the issue of public support for private schools can only be understood within this framework. Parents who believe that schools should be limited to meeting only their private objectives for their offspring will often object to many of the public goals of schooling. Even those parents who accept the overall public goals may be at odds with specific activities and goals that are incompatible with their private educational values. Public policy towards education has been to steer a course that embraces the public interest while allowing as much of the private interest as can be accommodated without bringing the two into serious conflict. This is a difficult charge which always places schools under a tension that is not easily resolved. Indeed, Chubb and Moe (1990) have argued that democracy is the problem that besets public education.

Prior to the nineteen fifties parents and school districts were able to resolve these potential conflicts through what Michael Katz (1971) calls "democratic localism."[1] That is, within each local setting communities were able to maintain public schools that reflected the predominant politics, values, culture, and wealth. Public schools in much of the nation were segregated by race, and school finance was largely a local matter based upon property taxes that raised more funding for students in wealthier districts, often considerably more, than for those in poorer enclaves. Many children with handicaps were excluded from schools or provided with inadequate services, and those who were educationally at-risk were given no special assistance and were often tracked into dead-end curricula. Inculcation of religion of the dominant group at the local level was a common feature of school life. While each of

[1] The argument in this section is developed more fully in Levin (1987).

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these policies might be incompatible with the public goals of schooling, they were based upon a tacit compromise premised on the view that those with power could influence policies and local practices in directions that would benefit their children over others. Children from groups that lacked powerful advocacy in their behalf, such as blacks, the poor, and the handicapped were treated in a less enviable way.

But, over the next 40 years decisions and policies set out by courts, legislatures, and Congress reduced these prerogatives and inequalities so that schools became more and more alike with fewer public alternatives for meeting private educational preferences. Laws were passed that provided special benefits to economically disadvantaged, bilingual, and handicapped students and that pushed for racial and gender equality. School funding was more nearly equalized among school districts. And official policies of racial segregation were proscribed by law. The press for greater equity removed many of the privileges held traditionally by dominant groups in local communities.

By 1980, a general backlash emerged with the aim of regaining what was lost. If local political power could no longer be used to create schools that echoed the racial preferences, values, religious practices, and wealth of local residents, other alternatives had to be sought. Most of these alternatives revolved around ways to increase local choice within the public schools. Public choice alternatives refer to the ability of families to choose from among public schools within a district or among districts rather than having students assigned to schools (See the essays in Clune and Witte, 1990). Some districts even created magnet schools with special themes to attract families who were interested in those themes (e.g. science, the arts, technology, multiculturalism, business, health professions, and so on). But, even these forms of public choice have been superseded in the last decade of this century by more radical alternatives such as charter schools and educational vouchers. Charter schools

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are schools established under public authority that are exempt from many state and local policies and laws as long as they meet the goals set out in their charter (Nathan, 1996). They can be initiated by parents or educators and can represent distinct educational philosophies within the broader public context for schooling. Educational vouchers represent the most complete response to the public-private dilemma by funding all schools that meet certain minimal requirements, whether publicly or privately sponsored, with public dollars.

Existing Forms of Public-Private Collaboration

Before addressing the educational voucher initiative, it is important to review briefly existing practices of public funding for private schools; business-school partnerships, and family-school connections.

Public Funding of Private Schools

State and local governments provide considerable subsidies to private schools for non-sectarian purposes. The general view is that if state funding benefits the child rather than the religious institutions that sponsor most private schools, it is permissible under federal and state constitutions. Typical government subsidies to private schools are found in four areas: tax-free status, textbooks, transportation, and categorical programs.

Because almost all existing private schools are educational institutions that are not for profit, they are exempt from taxes even though they are eligible for all pertinent local and state services supported by tax revenues. Textbooks that are provided to public schools for the standard non-religious courses are often provided free of charge to private schools. Many states also provide transportation of students to private schools on the same basis as

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public school students. Finally, federal and state programs for disadvantaged students are often offered at private schools in classrooms that are not adorned with religious symbols and that are staffed by employees from the local public school district. One early study (Sullivan, 1974) found that about one-quarter of the cost of private schools is borne by government, but that study was done some two decades ago when the law was more restrictive, so the portion is likely to be much higher now.

Business Partnerships

Businesses have had a long tradition of establishing partnerships with schools in a variety of ways. Usually these are based upon both self-interest and altruism. Such partnerships can improve the preparation of the labor force hired by businesses and provide good public relations, but they can also be forged in the spirit of community involvement. The forms of such partnerships are widely varied. At the local level they include "adopt-a-school programs" that offer financial assistance to schools, provision of expertise to assist schools on particular subjects or managerial challenges, release-time of employees for volunteer tutors, and awards for student performance. At regional and national levels they may include formation of private associations to provide political support for school reform as well as larger grant programs that assist schools to make major changes. For example, IBM sponsors grant competitions with awards in the millions of dollars to school systems that will make a significant commitment to new applications of computers and related technologies.

Schools have also had a long tradition of cooperative work arrangements with businesses for training and placement of students in vocational studies (Steinberg, 1997). By providing part-time jobs for students that relate to their vocational preparation, these businesses offer both applied experiences and income. Such business arrangements may also include gifts of

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equipment and funds to support vocational programs. And, often the same businesses will hire the graduates of these programs if they have performed satisfactorily. This is an example of a mutually beneficial partnership activity since it supports both learning and the training of a local workforce.

Schools and Families

At a less formal level, but even more consequential in terms of student outcomes, there is a tacit partnership between public entities (schools) and and private ones (families). It is well-known that student achievement in schools is heavily dependent upon family influences. In particular, children from families of higher socioeconomic origins with higher income and parental education tend to have better educational achievement than those from lower more modest origins (Natriello, McDill, & Pallas, 1990). The former families are better able to provide the resources and experiences that support school learning.

It is useful to separate family influences on learning into two parts. The first part consists of the "natural" interactions that more educated and affluent families have with their children that lead to educational success. Such families use a standard version of the English language, an educated vocabulary, and styles of interaction that tend to be more oriented towards questioning and reasoning techniques (Heath, 1983). These are the types of interactions which lead to the knowledge and behavior that schools build upon and that achievement tests measure. In addition, their higher incomes mean that students are exposed to a richer set of worldly experiences that contribute to their education. Examples of this range of experiences include travel, computers, summer camps, books, hobbies, and music lessons. Finally, they are more able to provide the nutritional, health, counseling,

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tutoring, and other inputs that support school learning. But, in addition to these there are specific practices that families can engage in with respect to the schools their children attend that will improve both their children's chances of success and the quality of the schools.

Joyce Epstein, the foremost scholar in the area of school, family, and community partnerships, has identified six types of family involvement (Epstein, Coates, Salinas, Sanders, & Simon, 1997).

1. Parenting—helping families establish home environments to support children as students.
2. Communicating—designing effective forms of school-to-home and home-to school communication about school programs and student progress.
3. Volunteering—recruiting and organizing parental help and support for school.
4. Learning at home—assisting families to help students at home with homework and other school-related activities.
5. Decision making—including families in school decisions and developing parent leadership.
6. Collaboration with community—using community resources to support families, strengthen schools, and increase student learning.

It is noteworthy that these activities represent forms of school support for families and communities, and forms of community and family support for schools, both efforts focusing primarily on improving student success. An excellent handbook for action in all of these areas is found in Epstein et al. (1997).

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Educational Vouchers

Although the concept of educational vouchers has been around for at least two centuries, the specific form that has been debated in recent years dates to an important publication by Milton Friedman on the role of the state in education (Friedman, 1962). In that work Friedman argued that schools should be funded by the government because of their importance in producing the values required for democratic functioning. Although Friedman called these "neighborhood benefits," they are similar to what we have referred to as the public benefits of education, contributions to the larger society rather than just the individual. But, Friedman argued that the fact that government should finance school does not mean that government should operate them. Suggesting that the government was an unresponsive monopoly, he asserted that schools ought to be placed in the competitive marketplace that would promote a plethora of for-profit and not-for-profit schools. To accomplish this the financing of schools would take place through government issued vouchers that could be applied toward tuition at "approved" schools that met minimal requirements for assuring the public interest. These vouchers would be redeemed at the state treasury by schools, and parents could add on to the vouchers if they had the means and the commitment to do so.

According to Friedman, such a plan would assure efficiency, innovation, and responsiveness to parental concerns through the incentives of the competitive marketplace. Schools would emerge to serve particular market niches and compete among themselves, and parents could shift their patronage from schools that displeased them to ones that were more attractive. Further, a much larger variety of schools would arise to serve the private interests of families, while protecting the public interest through minimal regulations on

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curriculum. Thus, the Friedman proposal acknowledged existence of both the public and private benefits of education while creating a financial mechanism for the private marketplace that would presumably allow attention to both.

Whether the voucher plan that was proposed by Friedman would do all that he claimed has been a source of contention ever since. Friedman's initial voucher plan was shy on details with respect to the size of the voucher, regulations to assure that the public benefits would be produced, and provision of information to both schools and prospective producers, on the one hand, and families, on the other, a prerequisite for a competive market. Thus, a number of different voucher plans have arisen over the years that have made concrete provisions in each of these areas with somewhat different goals for each plan. Among the most notable are the plans proposed by the Center for the Study of Public Policy (1970) that was designed for a voucher experiment to be administered by the U.S. Office of Economic Opportunity as part of the Poverty Program; the proposal for transforming state school systems to vouchers by Coons and Sugarman (1978); and that of Chubb and Moe (1990) which caught the attention of many school reformers in recent years. In addition, publicly-sponsored voucher demonstrations have been taking place in both Cleveland and Milwaukee, and privately-financed voucher projects have been sponsored in San Antonio, New York, and Indianapolis (Moe, 1995).

Differences among different voucher plans can be largely understood in terms of three dimensions: finance, regulation, and information (Levin, 1991).

Finance. Central to the potential impact of vouchers on equity is the size of the voucher and the issue of whether families can add their own resources to school payments. Friedman's original voucher plan would suggest a flat voucher of modest value with parental

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add-ons to that voucher if parents had the means and desire. Later voucher plans typically limit parental add-ons and include compensatory vouchers, larger vouchers for the poor and handicapped to compensate for the higher costs of meeting their educational needs (e.g. Center for the Study of Public Policy, 1970). In addition, school participation requires financial provision for transportation in order to gain access to potential alternatives, many parents cannot provide this for their children because of costs or work schedules. The initial Friedman plan does not discuss transportation, but it is recognized as a requirement by later plans.

Regulation. Even Friedman suggests that voucher schools should be subject to some curriculum regulations to ensure that they produced public benefits, although such regulation would be minimal. But, subsequent voucher plans such as that of the Center for the Study of Public Policy (1970) or Coons and Sugarman (1978) would require a variety of other measures including regular reporting of achievement test results of their students. In addition, they would require non-discrimination in admissions and a lottery for some portion of their admissions if a school received more applications than it could enroll. Stringent curriculum and teacher licensing requirements have also been debated as requirements for schools to be approved to redeem vouchers.

Information. Efficiency in competitive markets requires that substantial information be available to both buyers and sellers. For example, families need to know the available alternatives and their educational consequences. Although the Friedman plan makes no provision for gathering and disseminating information on schools, other plans typically assume some responsibility for doing so.

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In summary, there is no single voucher plan, but many different ones with different provisions that auger for different educational outcomes. Some tend to focus more fully on maximizing family choice, while others would sacrifice some choice through funding and regulations that would emphasize equity and a common core of learning.

Four Major Dimensions

In order to understand the arguments for and against educational vouchers and public dollars for private schools, it is important to identify four major criteria that emerge in the public debate. Each of these criteria is highly important to particular policy-makers and stakeholders: freedom to choose, efficiency, equity, and social cohesion.

Freedom to choose. For many advocates of vouchers, the freedom to choose the kind of school that emulates their values, educational philosophies, religious teachings, and political outlooks is the most important issue in calling for educational change. This criterion places a heavy emphasis on the private benefits of education and the liberty to ensure that schools are chosen that are consistent with the child-rearing practices of families.

Efficiency. Perhaps the most common claim for educational vouchers is that they will improve the efficiency of the schooling system by producing better educational results for any given outlay of resources. Numerous studies have been done that attempt to measure differences in student achievement between public and private schools generally or between students using vouchers in private and similar students in public schools in the few cases of voucher demonstrations (Levin, 1998; Metcalf et al., 1998; Peterson, Myers, & Howell, 1998).

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Equity. A major claim of those who challenge vouchers is that they will create greater inequity in the distribution of educational resources, opportunities, and results by gender, social class, race, language origins, and geographical location of students. Voucher advocates argue that, to the contrary, the ability to choose schools will open up possibilities for students who are locked into inferior neighborhood schools and that the competitive marketplace will have great incentives to meet the needs of all students more fully than existing schools.

Social Cohesion. As set out above, a major public purpose of schooling is to provide a common educational experience with respect to curriculum, values, goals, language, and political socialization so that students from many different backgrounds will accept and support a common set of social, political, and economic institutions. The challenge is whether a marketplace of schools competing primarily on the basis of meeting the private goals of parents and students will coalesce around a common set of social, political, and economic principles in the absence of extensive regulations or powerful social incentives.

Evidence

The desirability of a voucher approach will depend upon how effective educational vouchers are relative to the existing alternatives on each of the four criteria as well as how much weight is attached to each. It is important to note that if a particular dimension is not valued highly by a constituency, the evidence will not matter very much for that dimension. That is, preference for vouchers or a particular voucher plan is not completely dependent upon evidence on all its dimensions, but only on what is deemed important by the observer. The fact that no full-fledged voucher program has been tested in the U.S. means that evidence is limited. However, in the nineties there has been a considerable outpouring of

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empirical literature on some of the voucher demonstrations, differences in achievement between public and private schools, studies of choice patterns, and costs that can be used to partially examine these issues (a summary is found in Levin, 1998). On the basis of these as well as the overall knowledge of how markets function, some conclusions might be drawn. But, even these will depend ultimately on the type of voucher plan that is being considered. For example, voucher plans with minimal regulations may have very different consequences than ones that are highly regulated.

With respect to the criterion of freedom of choice, the voucher alternative would seem to be superior in giving families a wider variety of possibilities that might match more closely their private goals in raising their children. The gap in favor of educational vouchers would be widest when compared with a traditional school system in which children must attend their neighborhood schools. It will narrow in those cases where public schools include intra-district and inter-district choice and magnet schools and be narrowest when charter schools are allowed with their quasi-independence. Obviously, freedom of choice will depend heavily on the existence of and access to alternatives, factors that are dependent on the provision of transportation and good information.

With respect to efficiency of schools under educational vouchers, we can divide the phenomenon into two types: micro and macro. Micro-efficiency refers to the ability to maximize educational results at the school site. Obviously, if different schools are producing different types of educational outcomes to please their clients, comparisons are difficult. Indeed, market advocates would view the fact that parents could choose the kind of education that they want for their children as a major dimension of using resources more efficiently. Voucher detractors would argue that the absence of the public goods aspect of

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education in the market solution means that the voucher schools simply produce more of the private benefits at the expense of public ones.

When student achievement is used as the measure of educational result, it appears that private schools and those under voucher arrangements might have a small advantage over public schools with comparable students (Levin, 1998), possibly because they are able to more readily focus on a narrower range of outcomes than those under democratic control (Chubb and Moe, 1990). Studies examining differences in educational achievement between students in public and private schools or in voucher demonstration projects show a private school advantage, although the differences are small (Levin, 1998; Metcalf et al., 1998; Myers et al., 1998). Typical differences are a few percentiles and are limited to one or two subjects out of four or five that have been measured. For example, after two years the Cleveland voucher demonstration found advantages for voucher students over comparable public school students in language, but not in reading, science, mathematics, or social studies (Metcalf et al., 1998).

Macro-efficiency includes not only results at school sites, but also the comparative costs of the overall infrastructure to maintain an educational voucher system relative to the overall costs for maintaining the existing system. Particular areas of such infrastructure include record-keeping, school accreditation, transportation, information, and adjudication of disputes. Clearly, some of the costs of a voucher system will depend upon the provisions that are put in place. For example, if micro-efficiency benefits are to be obtained through competition, then a substantial investment in information and transportation may be required. If schools are to be accredited for vouchers on the basis of meeting the requirements for producing public benefits, a monitoring agency will be required. Even in the absence of these provisions, the cost of record-keeping will rise as a central agency must

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keep track of student attendance, voucher eligibility, and redemption of vouchers on a statewide basis.[2] A study by Levin and Driver (1996, 1997) makes a first attempt at reviewing these measures of supportive infrastructure and finds that such costs for a system of educational vouchers would be considerably higher than for the existing system.

In summary, educational vouchers would promote higher efficiency at the school site, but the costs of infrastructure to support such a system would be considerably higher than that of the present system. On balance, it is difficult to say whether macro-efficiency favors one system or the other in the absence of greater detail about the features of the voucher system and the setting where it would be emplaced. Further, without taking account of the consumer gains from freedom of choice and the potential losses of public benefits, it is not clear which approach is more efficient in the use of resources.

Although the existing system of public schools is highly stratified by race and social class as well as fiscal inequities, most analyses of educational vouchers suggest that they would increase inequities. There are three reasons for this conclusion. First, any voucher plan that allowed add-ons to the government-provided voucher would favor families with higher incomes and fewer children. A lack of investment in transportation and an effective information system would also favor those who are better off because of their abilities to afford transportation and access information. Second, the evidence from many studies on educational choice finds that the poor are least likely to take advantage of choice, and that both family selection and school selection lead to "cream skimming" of students (Levin, 1998).

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[2] For example, in California a state agency would need to shift from keeping track of about 1,000 school districts to maintaining records on about 6,000,000 students and as many as 25,000 schools. See Levin (1998).

The first of these could be countered by specific provisions that favor the poor such as compensatory vouchers that are larger, transportation, and effective information strategies. Whether these would be adequate to reduce inequities relative to the existing schools is not clear, and the costs of infrastructure to support a more equitable system would be high.

Finally, the criterion of social cohesion is the one that would seem to be more conducive under public school systems than an educational marketplace. The very appeal of freedom of choice is to send children to schools that emulate the specific values and goals of individual families rather than the common goals of society. Schools would rise up to compete for specific market niches by religion, political orientations, national origin, language, culture, and other salient dimensions. The common values and institutions that are required for addressing public goals of education would be undermined by such market behavior. Only through heavy regulation—which inhibits freedom of choice—could attempts be made to coerce schools into producing these public benefits.

The Voucher Debate

Those who believe that the issue of vouchers will be resolved by a spirited search for empirical evidence on some of these dimensions may be severely disappointed. Much of the support for or opposition to educational vouchers is premised on ideology and values rather than evidence. For those who believe strongly in freedom of choice in schooling and maximization of family preferences, the issues of equity and social cohesion may not be important, regardless of empirical findings in these domains. For those who believe strongly in social cohesion and equity, the issues of family preference and choice may not weigh heavily. Indeed, this seems to be why both sides have tended to limit the debate largely to efficiency and effectiveness comparisons of public schools with private and voucher schools,

a matter which both sides agree has some importance. Ultimately, the matter will be decided much more on the basis of values and political might than on evidence of which is "superior". And the struggle between those who view schools predominantly for their private benefits and those who view schools predominantly for their public benefits will continue to challenge and modify whatever system is put into place (Carnoy and Levin, 1985).

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